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NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
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“Enhancing US Operational Reach in Southeast Asia”

by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Maritime Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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3 February 2003

Abstract

The Pacific Region and more specifically Southeast Asia and the East Asian littoral are growing daily in their economic and strategic importance to our nation. Currently the preponderance of forces assigned to the Theater is oriented toward Northeast Asia and the potential for conflict on the Korean peninsula. While this treat continues to exist, the US Pacific Command (PACOM) must also pursue a neat term methodology to expand its operational reach and ability to respond to contingencies throughout the East Asian littoral, especially within Southeast Asia. The operational factors of space, force, and time must be managed through a system of enhanced basing options, improved mobility and increased presence.

Introduction

*Operational reach – distance over which one's military power can be concentrated and employed decisively.*¹

The 2001 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR 2001) has established a new course for the US military. It has shifted the basis for planning from a "threat-based" approach to a "capabilities-based" model. In this new paradigm we must identify and exploit capabilities that will deter and, if necessary, allow us to defeat any potential adversary.² QDR 2001 also calls for a greater reliance on forward forces to deter and defeat an adversary with "only modest reinforcement."³ This requirement poses significant difficulties to forward based and forward deployed forces throughout the globe, but in the Asia-Pacific Theater these challenges are greatly magnified by the vast expanse of the region. In the Pacific Theater, the vast preponderance of our military forces is currently focused toward the Korean Peninsula and the Northwest Pacific area. While acknowledging that this presence will need to be maintained to some degree, the US Pacific Command (PACOM) must also expand its operational reach and ability to respond to contingencies throughout the East Asian littoral, especially within Southeast Asia.

Several studies have examined this problem and proposed generally long-term solutions involving transformations in both force structure and posture.⁴ However, a near

¹ Vego, Milan, *Operational Warfare*, 643.

² Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*, (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, September 30, 2001), iv.

³ Ibid., 20.

⁴ See Khalizad, Zalmay and others, *The United States and Asia, Toward a New U. S. Strategy and Force Posture*. (Santa Monica: Rand, 2001.), Hawley, Richard E. and others, "Enhancing USAF's Pacific Posture." (*Armed Forces Journal International*, September,

term answer is needed to address the capability to project military power and influence into Southeast Asia with the forces we maintain in the theater today. The operational factors of space, force, and time must be managed through a system of enhanced basing options, improved mobility and increased presence. In this manner we can improve our current operational reach, maximize regional stability, and build on current international relationships to strengthen US influence in Southeast Asia.

The Asia-Pacific region continues to grow in importance to the US. QDR 2001 recognizes this and points to the East Asian littoral, defined as the Bay of Bengal to the Sea of Japan, as a "challenging area" owing to its size and the limited density of US basing infrastructure in the region⁵. This region's economic importance and potential for instability cannot be overstated. Recent events such as the conflict in East Timor, the US assistance to the Philippine government in its pursuit of the Abu Sayyaf terrorist organization and the terrorist bombing in Bali, Indonesia emphasize this point. Before embarking on a solution to our deficiencies in operational reach in Southeast Asia we must first examine the current situation in this region. This will include addressing likely operational requirements, the operational environment, and finally an evaluation of the forces currently available to address the stated requirements.

Operational Requirements

The operational requirements are derived from the most likely missions that PACOM could be tasked with in the near-term. These missions would be in support of our national strategy to assure our allies and friends, dissuade adversaries, deter aggression, and

2002.) and Bowie, Christopher J., *The Anti-Access Threat and Theater Air Bases*, (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2002.)

⁵ Ibid., 4.

decisively defeat any adversary if deterrence fails.⁶ Operationally, PACOM can support these goals through its Theater Strategic Capabilities Plan (TSCP), by engagement with allies and friends in the region, maintaining a robust presence in the region, re-addressing the balance of forces between Northeast and Southeast Asia, and working to improve our forward combat capability.⁷ Peacetime employment most likely consists of participation in combined exercises with allies, freedom of navigation operations, and humanitarian assistance. Contingency possibilities include continued support and prosecution of the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) and crisis response to internal division in one of the Southeast Asian nations, most likely the fragile state of Indonesia.⁸ Interregional war in Southeast Asia is a less likely possibility.

Operational Environment

The first and foremost environmental factor in the Asia-Pacific Theater is distance. The vast expanse of the Pacific Ocean makes rapid movement of forces and the required logistical support problematic. For example, it is just over 5000 nautical miles (NM) from Travis AFB, California to Andersen AFB, Guam, approximately equivalent to the 5600 NM trip from Dover AFB, Delaware to Kuwait City. However, forces dispatched to Guam have just reached the periphery of the Southeast Asian operational environment. Even once these forces arrive in theater, from Guam they will still have to travel nearly 1400 NM to the Philippines and over 2500 NM to Singapore, Bangkok, or Jakarta. Our forces stationed in Japan will have to travel over 2000 NM from Okinawa to Singapore and over 3000 NM from

⁶ Department of Defense, iii-iv.

⁷ Fargo, Admiral Thomas B., "Advance Questions for the Nominee for the Position of Commander-in-Chief, United States Pacific Command," April 26, 2002, <http://www.pacom.mil/speeches/sst2002/fargoconfirmation.pdf>, 9.

Tokyo to Jakarta.⁹ This equates to four to seven days of steaming to deploy a Carrier Battle Group or Amphibious Ready Group from Japanese waters to Southeast Asia, not including the time required to ready the ships and personnel (See appendix B). While air movement can be accomplished much faster, these distances have the potential to test our operational mobility. One method to overcome this space-time-force factor is the pre-positioning of material at suitable bases in proximity to potential crisis locations.

Additionally, this region's geography poses significant operational challenges. Southeast Asia consists of continental nations like Thailand and Australia as well as several archipelagic nations like the Philippines and Indonesia. The regional geography includes several key points along the Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) such as the Strait of Malacca and the Torres Strait. With nearly half of the world's merchant fleet capacity plying these waters,¹⁰ free navigation is critical to interregional and international commerce. Preventing a hostile force from interdicting this movement is certainly a vital interest of the US.

The political landscape in the Pacific is as diverse as the geography of the region. On the whole, the US enjoys good relations with nations throughout the region. While the potential for confrontation between the US and China looms in the long view, other interregional and internal political issues weigh more heavily on current planners. The potential for the spread of Islamic radicalism exists in Indonesia (the largest Muslim nation in the world), Malaysia, and the Philippines. While some of the radical Islamic organizations in

⁸ Taylor, Paul D., ed, *Asia and the Pacific, U.S. Strategic Traditions and Regional Realities*, (Newport: Naval War College Press, 2001), 18.

⁹ Great circle distances from <http://www.indo.com/distance/index.html>. These figures were rounded to the nearest 100 NM.

¹⁰ Khalilzad, 35.

the region, such as the previously mentioned Abu Sayyaf, have ties to the Al-Qaeda network, most are focused on internal issues, particularly separatism.¹¹ These movements have the potential to destabilize the weak Indonesian government and to a lesser degree the governments of Malaysia and the Philippines. The Bali bombing and the plot against US interests in Singapore are examples of the threats these groups pose to Western interests in their pursuit of organizational goals. Regional support for the GWOT has been mixed, with Australia, Singapore and the Philippines taking an active role, while Malaysia and Indonesia are more hesitant to directly confront the issue due to domestic political concerns.¹²

There are two other political issues that bear mention. The first is the role of the association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and its effect on regional stability. ASEAN was formed to promote regional security in 1967 by five nations – Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and the Philippines – with the backdrop of the conflict in Vietnam and the Cold War. This “security community” of post-colonial nations was intended to counter the supposed “domino theory” of communist expansion in the region.¹³ Since the end of the Cold War, the organization has expanded in membership and now includes Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam. While this union has been effective in preventing a general war, it has been less than effective in dealing with interregional disagreements and especially unwilling to intervene to address internal strife within a member nation.¹⁴ US policy makers should not depend on ASEAN to ensure

¹¹ Glosserman, Brad and Eun Jung Cahill Che, eds., “*Comparative Connections, A Quarterly E-Journal on East Asian Bilateral Relations*,” (Honolulu: Pacific Forum, First Quarter 2002), 53-54.

¹² Ibid., 53.

¹³ Acharya, Amitav, *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia, ASEAN and the Problem of Regional Order*, (London: Routledge, 2001), 47.

¹⁴ Ibid., 55-72, 120-122.

stability and regional security; instead a web of bilateral defense agreements is of greater importance, including those that exist between ASEAN member nations and the US.

Finally, the ongoing territorial dispute between China and several of the ASEAN member nations, specifically Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei, Vietnam and the Philippines, over the Spratly Islands should be noted. This dispute involves an archipelago situated in the South China Sea. These islands are of value due to their strategic position along the primary SLOC between Northeast Asia and Southeast Asian markets and the Strait of Malacca. The territory is also rich in resources, including potential oil and gas reserves.¹⁵ This dispute has the potential to lead to conflict within ASEAN as well as between an ASEAN nation and China. The US has not taken a position on this dispute but could find itself involved due to its bilateral defense treaty with the Philippines, should the Philippine claims be challenged militarily. In recent years China has been more forceful in asserting its claims, seizing islands in 1974, 1988 and 1995. Two of these three incidents occurred soon after a US movement out of the region (Vietnam in 1974 and the departure from the Philippines in the early 1990s).¹⁶

Forces

The US Pacific Command is the largest geographic Combatant Command in the US military. It encompasses a region from the West Coast of the US to the Middle East and

¹⁵ Coker, Larry W. Jr., "The Spratley Islands Dispute: Can ASEAN Provide the Framework for a Solution." (Unpublished Research Paper, Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, PA, 1996), 2-3.

¹⁶ da Cunha, Derek, *Southeast Asia's Security Dynamics: A Multiplicity of Approaches Amidst Changing Geopolitical Circumstances*, (ISEAS Working Papers No. 4 (99), Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 1999), 12-15.

from the North to South poles.¹⁷ Numerous forces are assigned to PACOM and dispersed throughout the region. However, for the purpose of our discussion we will limit ourselves to the forces in closest proximity to Southeast Asia, excluding those based on the Korean Peninsula. Due to the constant threat from North Korea, Korean based US forces are rarely dispatched from the peninsula. While the long view may include Korean re-unification and a redistribution of some of these forces, their near-term availability is doubtful. The forces available consist of those based in Japan and the US Territory of Guam.

While these have also historically focused on preparing for conflict on the Korean peninsula, in keeping with the vision expressed in QDR 2001, they must prepare for expanded operations throughout the East Asian littoral, with little reinforcement from outside the theater.¹⁸ These forces consist of five major elements, all with extensive experience in Southeast Asia. The first is the III Marine Expeditionary Force (III MEF), which consists of air, ground and service support units based in Okinawa and MCAS Iwakuni, Japan. III MEF also contains the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit (31st MEU) as one of its subordinate commands. Naval forces in the region fall under the Seventh Fleet based in Yokosuka, Japan and include both an Amphibious Ready Group (ARG) and the USS Kitty Hawk Carrier Battle Group (CVBG). The Army maintains Special Operations Forces in Okinawa which are prepared for employment throughout the region. The final two entities are numbered Air Forces: the Fifth Air Force, with its headquarters at Yokota Air Base (AB) near Tokyo and

¹⁷ The specific boundaries of PACOMs geographic area of responsibility are defined in the Unified Command Plan. See US President, Memorandum, *Unified Command Plan*, (Washington, D. C.: The White House), April 30, 2002, 11-12.

¹⁸ Department of Defense, 20.

including forces at Kadena AB, Okinawa and Misawa AB, Japan, and the Thirteenth Air Force, located at Andersen Air Force Base, Guam.¹⁹

In order to address operational requirements in support of national objectives, the QDR 2001 directs a re-orientation of the global US military posture. The re-orientation in the Asia-Pacific Theater will include: developing a more flexible basing system with emphasis beyond Northeast Asia, gaining temporary access to foreign facilities for training and exercises, a redistribution of forces to promote deterrence, and enhancing mobility through, among other things, pre-positioning and enhanced basing infrastructure.²⁰ In addition, QDR 2001 directs the Secretary of the Navy to increase CVBG presence in the Western Pacific and the Secretary of the Air Force to increase contingency basing in the Pacific and ensure sufficient en route logistics to support operations in the Western Pacific.²¹

Near-term Solutions

A reasonable near term goal would be the creation of a system which would allow PACOM's air or naval forces to respond to a crisis in Southeast Asia within 48 hours. These forces should be equipped for up to seven days of operations. Seven days should be an adequate period to allow other inter-theater and intra-theater assets to respond to the situation.²²

In approaching this problem, several restraints must be placed on any near term solution in order to make it realistically attainable. First, it must be limited to forces

¹⁹ The Thirteenth Air Force does not have forces assigned, but is a headquarters unit tasked with conducting numerous exercises throughout Southeast Asia and therefore has extensive operational experience throughout the region.

²⁰ Department of Defense, 26.

²¹ Ibid., 27.

stationed in the region and readily available as listed above. While forces from CONUS and other theaters would likely be available for contingency response, these forces should not be part of addressing PACOM's operational reach on a day-to-day basis. Second, major infrastructure and force structure changes include major defense programming and budgetary issues, outside the scope of this discussion. Several suggestions along these lines have merit, such as a major build up of infrastructure and forces in Guam and the development of longer range strike platforms.²³ Finally, any reasonable solution must account for the realities of Southeast Asian politics. While the US maintains relatively favorable relations with all the Southeast Asian nations, there would be a reluctance to allow the permanent basing of significant US forces in almost any country in the region.

Creating a Southeast Asian Web

Given these assumptions, the key to enhancing our operational reach in Southeast Asia will be a greater utilization of the strategically located island of Guam coupled with enhanced access to bases throughout the region. The new National Security Strategy emphasizes the need for bases beyond Northeast Asia in order to “contend with uncertainty” in the future.²⁴ Access to foreign ports and bases has been “central to our regional strategic culture” since Admiral Perry visited Japan in 1853.²⁵ While access to foreign bases cannot always be assured, the cultivation of a “web” of basing options offers us the best chance of

²² Appendix B illustrates the space-time relationship for forces deploying by sea in the region. A movement from Japanese waters to Singapore would take less than 5 days for a CVBG and less than 7 days for an ARG.

²³ Khalilzad, 75.

²⁴ President, Executive Order, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, (Washington, D.C.: The White House, September, 17, 2002), 29.

²⁵ Taylor, 102.

ensuring access to some or all of these bases in a crisis.²⁶ As noted by the Air Force Chief of Staff, General Jumper, “access is an issue until you begin to involve the vital interests of the nation that you want and need as a host. Then access is rarely an issue.”²⁷ Improvement to these bases would primarily consist of pre-positioned supplies and equipment, vice forces.

Our first step toward creating such a web will be to build upon the bi-lateral relationships we currently enjoy with several key Southeast Asian nations; Australia, Singapore, Thailand and possibly the Philippines. Australia has historically been one of our staunchest allies and has been an active participant in the GWOT, even more so in light of the recent bombing in Bali, Indonesia where several hundred Australian citizens were killed or injured.²⁸ QDR 2001’s direction has been seen as a sign of increased interest by the US in a more permanent military presence in Australia.²⁹ Enhancing our ability to deploy to Australian bases on the periphery of Southeast Asia is a logical step in increasing our reach in the region.

This is also the case in Thailand, where we have pursued infrastructure improvements at bases such as Khorat AB in support of semi-annual combined exercises. With Singapore, in addition to several annual exercises in that nation, we maintain a small military contingent there today. This contingent consists of a naval supply activity and an Air Force training

²⁶ Hebert, Adam J, “Footholds on the Asian Rim,” *Air Force Magazine*, (November 2002), 60.

²⁷ Ibid., 60.

²⁸ Moore, Matthew and Mark Riley, “Terrorism Strikes Home,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, October 14, 2002, <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2002/10/14/1034222687786.html> and Allard, Tom and Mark Baker, “PM’s Vow: We’ll get the Bastards,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, October 21, 2002. <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2002/10/21/1034561389678.html>.

²⁹ Huiskens, Ron, “America’s New Military Roadmap for Asia and Australia.” *Asia-Pacific Defense Reporter*, (May 2002), 42.

support squadron.³⁰ The training squadron maintains a pool of aviation ground support equipment for use by US forces during exercises or while transiting through Paya Lebar AB.

Finally, US forces are currently deployed to the Philippines in support of that country's counter-terrorism campaign. This deployment along with the signing of the 1999 Visiting Forces Agreement and resumption of annual bi-lateral military training may signal the possibility of an increased US military presence, especially at some of the nation's under-utilized ports and airfields.³¹ All of these locations offer significant opportunities to augment our operational reach through various mild improvements in infrastructure and equipment pre-positioning.

Mobility

One of the realities faced by PACOM is a paucity of transportation assets to counter the vast expanse of the Pacific region. Fifth Air Force includes one C-130 squadron based at Yakota AB and one KC-135 refueling squadron based at Kadena AB. The aviation element of III MEF, the First Marine Aircraft Wing (1st MAW), includes a KC-130 unit that maintains a cargo capability in addition to its aerial refueling responsibilities. These assets represent a limited intra-theater air mobility capability. Additionally, many of the items required in a crisis situation (ordnance, food, water, and fuel) would quickly exceed the capacity of these assets. While our naval assets are inherently mobile, they still face up to a week of transit time within the theater. This includes the thirteen logistic vessels based at Guam as part of the Military Sealift Command, Marine Corps Maritime Prepositioning

³⁰ Khalilzad, 184.

³¹ Berry, Nicholas, "U.S. – Philippines Military Ties Get Tighter," *Center for Defense Information*, December 20, 2001, <http://www.cdi.org/asia/fa122001.txt> .

Squadron and the Navy and Air Force war-reserve ships.³² A more rapid response will require either increased pre-positioning of assets or an increase in presence in the region, or both.

³² Peterson, Gordon I, "A Port of Choice for the U.S. Seventh Fleet," *Sea Power*, (May 2001), 41.

Developing Forward Bases

Once we identify key positions in the region, we will need to work to gain access to these locations and address any infrastructure or pre-positioning requirements necessary to make these locations viable in a contingency. Recent studies have identified the requirement for two types of locations for aviation forces, the Forward Support Locations (FSLs) and the Forward Operating Locations (FOLs).³³ This methodology will also work well for naval forces; however, FOLs are less critical due to our Navy's underway replenishment capabilities. A FSL would provide storage for logistical support as well as in-theater maintenance support. A FSL would also provide infrastructure for air movement into the region as well as basing options for long range bombers and patrol aircraft.³⁴ FOLs would be in closer proximity to potential trouble spots, ideally within 1000-1500 nautical miles from the objective area(s) to support fighter operations.³⁵ FOLs in critical areas would require the pre-positioning of equipment (aviation ground support equipment, vehicles) and supplies (fuel, ordnance, food, medical supplies, tents) to enable the rapid deployment of heavier packages. These locations could be augmented by more austere FOLs that would require more time to "spin up."³⁶ Ideally, we would leverage existing infrastructure with modest equipment pre-positioning in order to minimize cost while maximizing capabilities. Guam

³³ See Killingsworth, Paul S. and others, *Flexbasing, Achieving Global Presence for Expeditionary Aerospace Forces*, (Santa Monica: Rand, 2000) and Tripp, Robert S. and others, *A Concept for Evolving the Agile Combat Support/Mobility System of the Future*, (Santa Monica: Rand, 2000).

³⁴ Killingsworth, xviii.

³⁵ Bowie, 14.

³⁶ Tripp, 25.

could serve as the FSL for the Southeast Asian region.³⁷ It would then be the basis for a web of potential FOLs in Northern Australia, Singapore, Thailand, and possibly the Philippines.

PACOM can utilize current training deployment budgets to move equipment and munitions to these locations, leaving the FOL pre-positioning stocks behind at the conclusion of the exercise. This process can be accomplished over multiple evolutions in order to spread the expense. Pre-positioning would have to be balanced to avoid affecting operations at our home stations and our potential to react to contingencies in other locations. In the long run, the funds expended supporting deployments to these FOLs for training and exercises would be reduced since much of the material required will already be in place.

The greatest difficulty will be identifying excess aviation support equipment and vehicles for pre-positioning. A relatively small increase in the support equipment maintenance budget for all the Services would likely make this less odious. There will also have to be significant planning for munitions pre-positioning. Munitions pre-positioned at one FOL will likely not be available if required for a contingency in another part of the theater. Therefore, the US should limit our munitions pre-positioning outside of US bases to no more than a one week supply for a single squadron. While this will limit long term capability, the pre-positioning of even one week supply of the relatively heavy munitions will greatly enhance our operational response timeline.³⁸

Guam

The US Territory of Guam is widely viewed as a key to the future presence of the US military in the Western Pacific region. It is centrally located, has significant, underutilized infrastructure (Andersen AFB and Apra Harbor), and is sovereign territory of the US, less

³⁷ See Killingsworth, 23, Khalilzad, 87, and Hebert, 61.

vulnerable to the whims of foreign opinion. Andersen AFB already has significant stocks of War Reserve Material (WRM) that includes support equipment, ordnance, and “more fuel...than any other place in the US Air Force.”³⁹ Guam is the home port for Maritime Prepositioning Ship Squadron Three (MPSRON Three), which consists of five vessels. Additionally, MPSRON Three has operational control of up to four other vessels that are part of the US Army and Air Force pre-positioning programs.⁴⁰ Apra Harbor contains modern ship repair facilities and a pier side berth capable of accommodating an aircraft carrier.⁴¹ Guam also offers significant training opportunities for US forces, including open ocean ranges, a bombing and naval gunfire range, and military facilities suitable for urban combat training and limited ground maneuver training. Guam’s potential as a base of operations for activities within Southeast Asia cannot be overstated.

The Thirteenth Air Force headquarters at Andersen AFB should be modestly enhanced with increased personnel and command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (C4ISR) capabilities. If possible, this augmentation would include personnel from other services in order to facilitate the rapid transition of this unit into a Joint Task Force (JTF) in the event of a crisis. Additionally, the Air Force and Navy should consider the basing of additional long range assets, such as bombers and P-3 maritime patrol aircraft at Andersen. These forces could rotate through Guam as detachments from their home units within CONUS. This would provide unit level training as well as enhanced presence in the region without the expense of permanently

³⁸ Tripp, 21-22.

³⁹ Hebert, 62.

⁴⁰ Military Sealift Command, “MPSRON Three,” <http://www.msc.navy.mil/mpsthree/> , 1.

⁴¹ Peterson, 41.

basing these assets in Guam. Guam would be the key to the operational mobility, sustainment and reach of any US forces deployed in Southeast Asia.

Singapore

As mentioned earlier, the US military has a permanent presence in the strategically important island nation of Singapore. This presence includes a naval supply unit and the 497th Combat Training Squadron, which supports several training exercises each year with the Singapore Air Force. The arrangement that the US Air Force maintains at Paya Lebar AB could serve as a model for other locations throughout Southeast Asia. The 497th maintains a pool of vehicles, aviation ground support equipment, a hanger and other operations spaces as well a small stock of tools and supplies. This minimizes the footprint required to deploy an aviation unit to Singapore and has supported several USAF and USMC fighter units passing through Singapore en route to Southwest Asia. Paya Lebar also has weapons storage facilities and limited US munitions storage could be negotiated in order to broaden the base's utility beyond mere training. The facilities at Paya Lebar could be utilized for contingency operations in the region with approval from the host nation. The only limiting factor in Singapore is space. Paya Lebar has limited available ramp space and would not support a large deployment of fighter or transport aircraft.

However, Singapore's key geographical positioning (see map, Appendix A) makes it a key FOL supporting PACOM's operational reach in Southeast Asia. All indications are that this relationship is very strong and can be maintained, possibly enhanced. Recent infrastructure improvements, such as the construction and offer for use by the US of a carrier capable berth at the new Changi naval base⁴² illustrate the Singaporean desire for a robust US

⁴² Khalilzad, 184 and Taylor, 95.

military presence. This infrastructure improvement greatly enhances the utility of Singapore as a forward base in time of crisis. US military presence is seen as helpful in maintaining stability in the region. In fact, the government of Singapore views the US as a balance against Chinese hegemony. The only concern being the “staying power of the United States in the region.”⁴³ The highly professional Singaporean military forces routinely train with their US counterparts. A desire to increase our operational flexibility through the stockpiling of limited munitions or the formalizing of an access agreement could have an overall positive effect on the critical US -Singapore bi-lateral relationship.

Northern Australia

President Bush identified building on the strong US-Australian alliance as a key to enhancing our Asian presence.⁴⁴ The continent’s location along the southern border of Southeast Asia makes it an ideal base of operations to support power projection into the region. The Royal Australia Air Force (RAAF) maintains two facilities in Northern Australia that would be ideal as FOLs. These locations are RAAF Base Darwin and the nearby RAAF Base Tyndal. Both of these locations consist of airbases capable of supporting fighter, tanker or transport aircraft. In addition, Darwin has a commercial port facility which has accommodated US military combat and logistical shipping in the past. Darwin is less than 1500 NM from most of Indonesia, including the islands of Borneo, New Guinea and the capital of Jakarta. Darwin and Tyndal are also approximately 1800 NM from Guam, which puts them well inside the range of C-130 logistical support. Both bases possess significant infrastructure such as fuel and ordnance storage, aircraft shelters, hangers, and personnel billeting.

⁴³ da Cunha, 15-16.

These bases offer much more space when compared to the facilities in Singapore, albeit they are not as well situated geographically. All of these facilities are familiar to 1st MAW and Fifth Air Force units as they are utilized several times each year during training exercises. The mobility and operational capabilities of our aviation assets could be greatly enhanced by the staging of aviation ground support equipment, at one or both of these locations. The pre-positioning would be enhanced if a unit similar to the 497th Combat Training Squadron based in Singapore were created. Due to the high volume of Marine and Navy utilization of Darwin, the personnel for this unit could possibly be sourced from III MEF and Seventh Fleet units. If this were coupled with a prepositioning of a one week supply⁴⁵ of ordnance for a single strike/fighter squadron, a realistic crisis response capability from this FOL would be created.

Thailand

Once again, the US has a strong relationship with the government of Thailand and has enjoyed ample access to Thai facilities during training exercises and in support of contingency deployments. The US military has made modest infrastructure improvements at Khorat AB for utilization during training exercises. Like the bases in Australia, Thai facilities offer ample space to support the deployment of significant forces to the region. The pre-positioning of ordnance, equipment, and possibly humanitarian supplies in Thailand would enhance its utility. The Joint US Military Advisor Group, Thailand could be

⁴⁴ President, 26.

⁴⁵ Assuming a 10-12 aircraft deployment, with a 1000 NM mission radius, the utilization of two Precision Guided Munitions (PGMs) per sortie, and a nominal 12 sorties/day for this distance, equates to 168 weapons. A small stock of air-to-air and air-to-surface missile would also be desired.

augmented and tasked with maintaining these stocks. Thailand's central position on the Southeast Asian mainland makes it an excellent choice for FOL development.

The Philippines

A "confluence of common interests"⁴⁶ has reinvigorated the US-Philippine relationship since the departure of US Forces in 1991-92. PACOM should continue to cultivate this relationship, building on the cooperation we have enjoyed during the GWOT and the pursuit of the Abu Sayyaf. The Philippines offers significant options, with bases on Mindanao offering reach into Southeast Asia and bases on Luzon offering better access to the South China Sea as well as Taiwan. The former US Naval Base at Subic Bay is also underutilized and the desire for an influx of capital from the US could motivate the Philippine leadership to allow greater access. The pre-positioning of significant material in the Philippines is not as critical as the locations previously discussed. This is due to the fact that the Philippine Islands lie in close proximity to Guam and Okinawa and forces based in these locations can move relatively quickly into the Philippine archipelago in a crisis.

Maintaining Combat Power in the Region

The next step in ensuring a rapid response to a contingency in Southeast Asia is increasing our operational presence in the region. QDR 2001 directed an increase in CVBG presence in the Western Pacific.⁴⁷ This will help, but a synchronized planning effort by PACOM could maintain a constant presence of either a CVBG, an ARG, or a minimum of one strike/fighter squadron in the region at all times. These units could be drawn from III MEF, Fifth Air Force, or the Seventh Fleet. While in the Southeast Asian region, these

⁴⁶ Berry, 1.

⁴⁷ Department of Defense, 27.

forces would conduct unit level training (often better than that available in Japan) as well as participate in training exercises with host nation forces. (Figure 1, in appendix C outlines a notional flow for a one year period.)

The intent of this plan would be, in the absence of the preferable CVBG or ARG, to maintain at least one strike/fighter unit in the notional Southeast Asia “box” as defined by a line from Guam, to the Philippines, Thailand, Singapore, Darwin and back to Guam. While this small force could hardly be called decisive in a crisis, the persistent presence offered by this system should encourage our allies and enhance our options. This unit could respond as a Flexible Deterrent Option (FDO), a show of force, or limited combat operations to buy time (a critical commodity in this vast theater) while a larger force assembles and deploys. A deployed strike/fighter unit should be married with a compatible cargo/aerial tanker detachment. For example, a Marine F/A-18 squadron would be supported by Marine KC-130 aircraft while an Air Force F-16 deployment would be augmented with KC-135 tankers based in Kadena. The enhanced FOLs described earlier would have a major positive effect on the mobility of units inside the box. In a crisis the units could move quickly to the optimum locations. With an infrastructure similar to that found at Paya Lebar, the logistical footprint of the unit would be small and with the munitions and equipment at the new location, the unit could possess a significant operational capability on arrival. As an example, on September 14, 2001, Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 212 deployed from Japan to Andersen AFB Guam in less than 36 hours. This deployment was facilitated by only four Marine KC-130 aircraft operating in the dual tanker/cargo role. This relatively small footprint was possible due to the amount of compatible support equipment available in

Guam. When the enhanced FOLs are coupled with a strike/fighter and tanker detachment a rapid response within Southeast Asia, in less than 48 hours, could be assured.

Conclusion

Southeast Asia's vital role in US foreign affairs will only continue to grow as this region's economic and political strength matures. This will likely be the next area in which the US will fight to prevent the violent spread radical Islamic movements. It is also likely that Southeast Asia will be the region in which we grapple with Chinese hegemony in Asia. Establishing and maintaining a credible presence in this region will go far in assuring our friends of our commitment to the region, dissuading and deterring our adversaries and enhancing our ability to decisively defeat any aggressor. The creation of a web of suitable FOLs throughout the region will also help assure access in time of a crisis. These FOLs will be useful in training, disaster relief, or conflict. Concepts such as sea basing or the advent of long range Unmanned Combat Air Vehicles will offer future improvements to our ability to decisively concentrate and employ our nation's combat power over great distance. However, our national interests in this dynamic region demand that we pursue a viable near-term solution. Under this system of pre-positioning and presence we could overcome the difficulties posed by the space and force realities of the theater and assure the arrival of a credible combat force within hours. This approach will be a vast improvement upon the current situation in which, short of the case of a CVBG deployed to or transiting the region, our response would at best be measured in days or weeks. These near term solutions are relatively inexpensive and will serve to strengthen our existing relationships with our SE Asian allies and hopefully deter our enemies.

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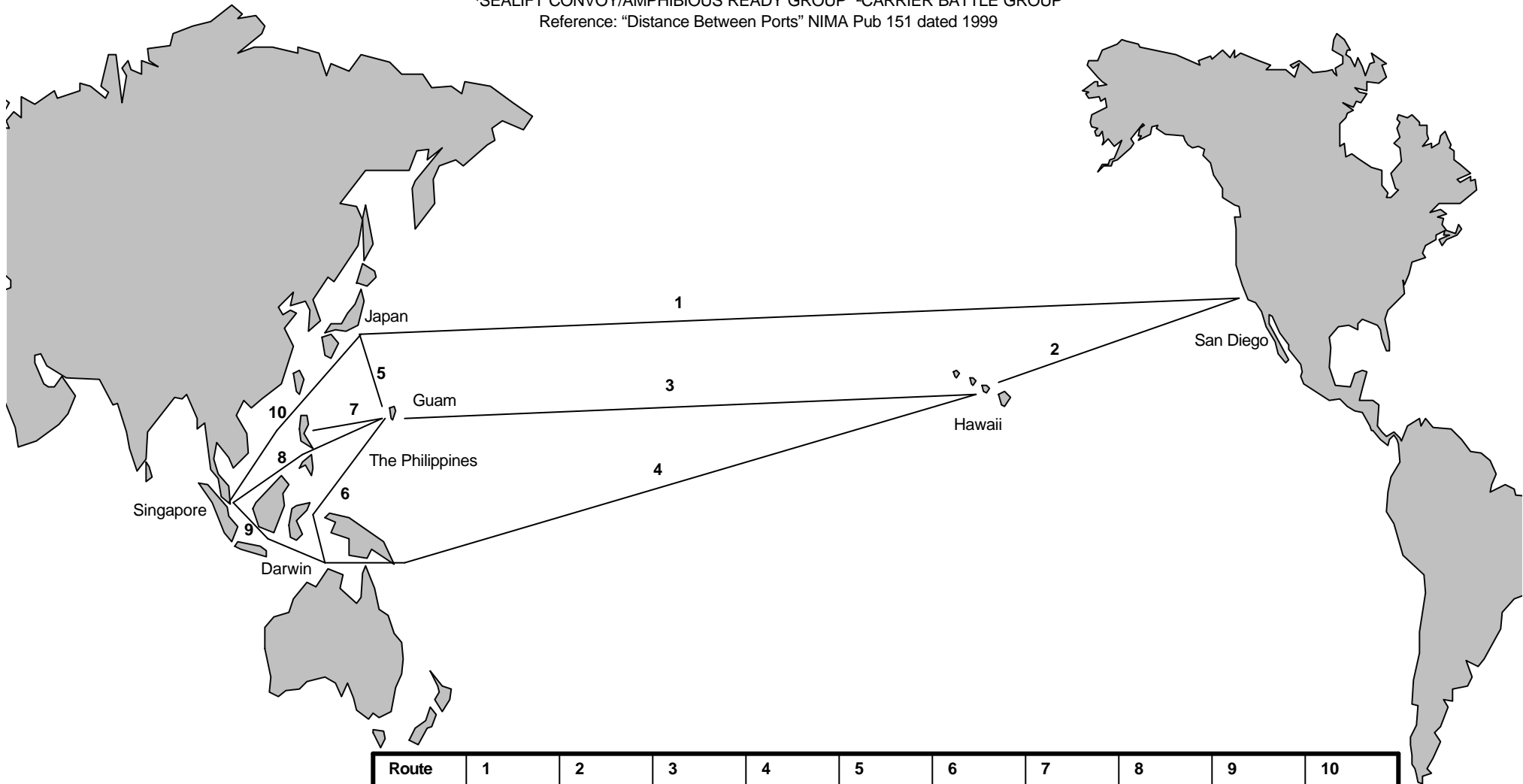
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SEA ROUTE TIMES(DAYS)

¹SEALIFT CONVOY/AMPHIBIOUS READY GROUP ²CARRIER BATTLE GROUP
Reference: "Distance Between Ports" NIMA Pub 151 dated 1999



Route	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
NM	4923	2285	3318	4893	1427	1925	1499	2585	2221	2889
18 KTS¹	11.4	5.3	7.7	11.3	3.3	4.5	3.5	5.7	5.1	6.7
25 KTS²	8.2	3.8	5.5	8.2	2.4	3.2	2.5	4.3	3.7	4.8

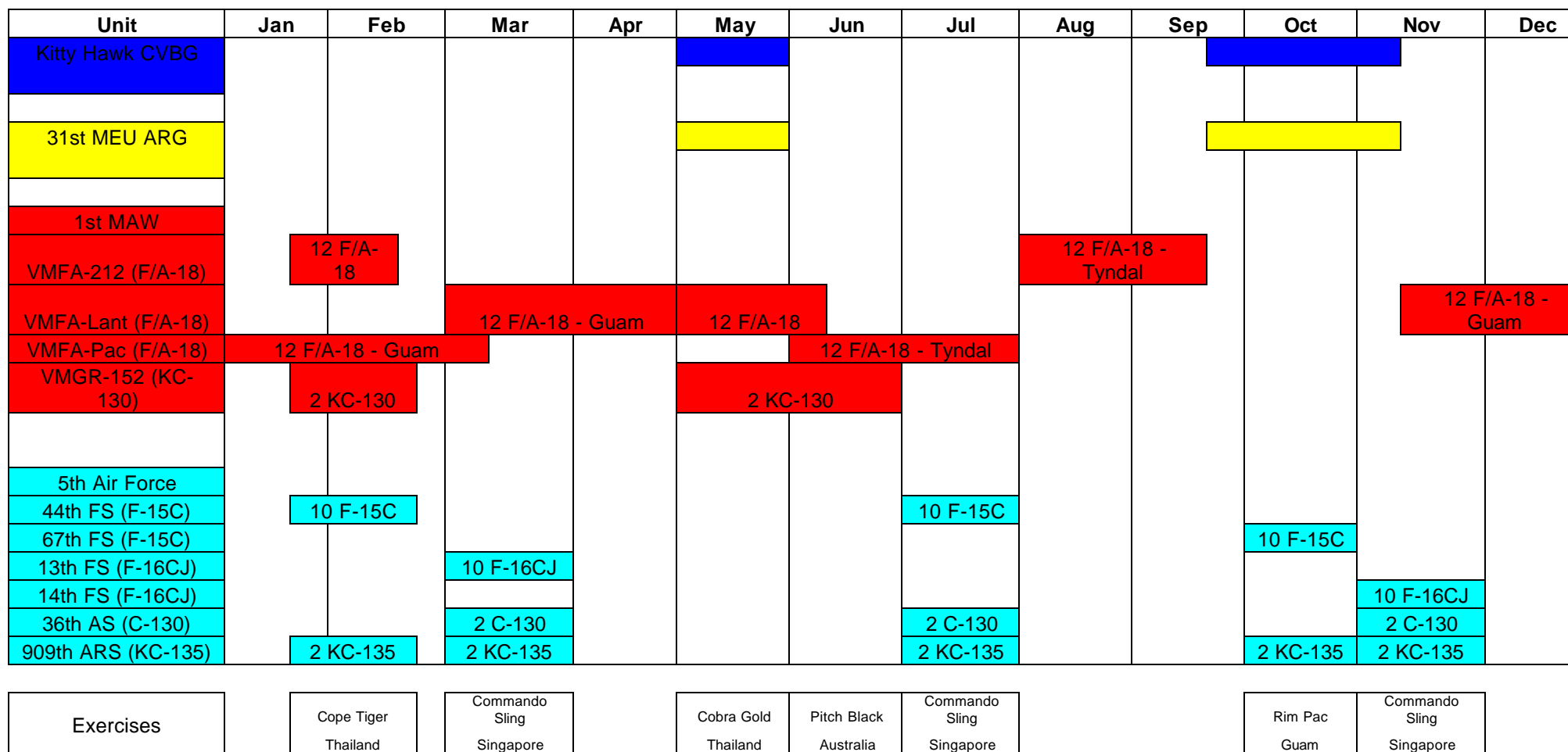


Figure 1, Notional Southeast Asian Presence Flow